



GUILD



VOICE OF THE
**CHIEF DATA
OFFICER.**

—

Data Leaders

Guild Think Tank.

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Richard Pope

Founder & CEO,
Data Leaders

Pascal Clément

Executive Chairman & Chief
Data Officer, Data Leaders

Foreword

In a rapidly evolving data landscape, Chief Data Officers (CDOs) are increasingly called upon to guide organisations through these turbulent shifts. “It can be lonely,” is a sentiment frequently echoed by CDOs, underscoring the increasing necessity for a dedicated space where they can unite and address emerging challenges.

This is what Data Leaders provides. Our mission is to support Chief Data Officers in enhancing their performance and that of their teams by giving them a vendor-free environment to exchange unbiased ideas and experiences. This platform empowers CDOs from various sectors and geographies to drive their critical transformations effectively.


As part of our mission, Data Leaders created the Guild CDO Think Tank, a unique event that unites top CDOs from around the world. These meetings foster open discussions, mutual motivation, and clearer role definition, with the outcomes encapsulated in the “Voice of the CDO” - a peer-reviewed report that mirrors the dynamic evolution of the data and AI space and the adapting role of CDOs within it.


The ensuing “Voice of the CDO” report delves into the diverse roles Chief Data Officers fulfil as they work diligently to enable the business transformation their organisations urgently need. It explores the present and burgeoning challenges faced by CDOs, with a spotlight on the mainstream incorporation of generative AI, and discusses vital strategies and mindsets required to navigate these challenges and harness emerging opportunities. The report aims to offer a clear and nuanced insight into the evolving landscape that Chief Data Officers navigate, aiding them in their journey to drive innovation and progress.


Given the fast-paced nature of this realm, the topics discussed are far from trivial. It is crucial for these matters to be deliberated and challenged by the leaders in this space – Chief Data Officers like you – and we welcome your views.


CONTRIBUTORS


Data Leaders would like to thank the members of the Data Leaders Guild Think Tank for their contributions to this report.


 Abbi Agna, VP Strategy & Transformation, Adecco Group


 Christopher Allison, CDO, Public Health Agency of Canada.


 Nuno Assis, Global Data & Strategy, Miele X


 Gillian Aziz, Chief Data Officer, Auchan Retail


 Volker Buscher, Advisory Board Member, Data Leaders


 Laia Collazos, Chief Data & Analytics Officer, Coca-Cola EuroPacific Partners Plc


 Bhavik Davda, Chief Customer Insight & Analytics Officer (Europe), A.S. Watson Group


 Andrew Day, CEO, AI Scout

 Gérard Guinamand, Senior Advisor, Data Leaders


 George Gouveia, Head of Data, Analytics & AI, Solvay


 Chris Gullick, Former Group Head of Data, International SOS


 Zakariás Gunyits, Chief Data Officer, MVM


 Sarah Hillman, Global Head of CRM & Data, The Travel Corporation


 Tembi Hommes, Global Chief Data Officer, Arup


 Matt Jeffries, Group Chief Analytics Officer, Pepper Financial


 Professor Ann John, Professor Public Health & Psychiatry, Swansea University


 Robert Kent, Global Chief Data Officer, Hays


 Xavier Lagardère, Chief Data Officer, Lufthansa Group


 Trent Lezer, Chief Data Officer, Managing Director, Global Data & Analytics, Greystar


 Didier Mamma, Vice President Data Value Creation & Data Lab, Decathlon

 Enrique Méndez, Chief Data & Analytics Officer, Edrington


 Francisco Montalvo, Chief Data Officer, Telefónica


 George Papadatos, Global Head Data Strategy and Data Assets, Syngenta


 Nirali Patel, Group VP Data Strategy, Liberty Global


 Samir Patel, Head of Data, BAE Systems plc

 Robbie Priddle, Head of Data Enablement, Specsavers

 Eddie Short, Managing Director Digital and Data, MidEuropa

 Kirit Solanki, VP Group Data & Analytics, Inter Ikea

 Bert Verdonck, Chief Executive Officer, Luxembourg National Data Service

 Geraldine Wong, Chief Data Officer, GXS Bank

INTRODUCTION

Today's data landscape is seeing a remarkable evolution. Thanks to the emergence of generative AI and platforms like ChatGPT, AI is becoming demystified with more and more business users now connecting the dots between what appears on the screen and the underlying data.

In the Voice of the Chief Data Officer report, we delve into the implications of this progression, which presents both opportunities and challenges, not just for CDOs but, more importantly, for their companies. The debate continues on why the CDO role remains ill-defined and is oftentimes misunderstood by Executive Leadership Teams. We further explore the growing divide between companies executing a fully CEO-owned data transformation strategy and those still striving to define what data means for their business. The report also shares key insights on strategies to bridge this gap.

The Voice of the CDO is presented in two parts:

PART 01: Breaking the CDO Glass Ceiling

The first, "Breaking the CDO Glass Ceiling", examines the multifaceted role undertaken by CDOs that clearly earns them a seat at the top table.

It goes on to discuss the skills CDOs need to bring to the forefront to become fully recognised as effective transformational leaders.

PART 02: Broadening the CDO Horizon

In the second part, "Broadening the CDO Horizon", the report explores how empowered CDOs are transcending data transformation and becoming business transformers. We look at examples of how they work across functions to directly impact their organisation's commercial and strategic objectives. Many topics discussed at the Guild Think Thank 2023 felt like distant prospects just a year ago.

The report acknowledges the acceleration of change in this environment and aims to share key learnings from the Data Leaders Community, providing insights for CDOs worldwide to tackle the critical challenges of their time. The goal is not to offer definitive answers but to capture valuable insights for the community.

BREAKING THE CDO GLASS CEILING



IN THIS SECTION, WE SHINE A SPOTLIGHT ON THE MULTIFACETED LEADERSHIP ROLE CARRIED OUT BY CDOs TO BUILD A DATA-ENABLED ENVIRONMENT OF SOUND DECISION-MAKING AND AGILE EXECUTION.

In this exceptional era of data-enabled change, the world is undergoing a profound transformation, with CEOs waking up to a changed market landscape on an almost daily basis. Chief Data Officers possess valuable expertise, making them crucial assets in enabling their companies to navigate ahead confidently. Despite the role being strategically critical, data from Data Leaders shows that only a modest 13% of CDOs report to the CEO, with the majority reporting to the CIO.

We explore the CDO's role as a:

- Business Transformation Leader
- Guide Through Uncertainty
- Steward of Sound Decision Making, and
- Guardian of Good Company Data Practices

BREAKING THE CDO GLASS CEILING

CHIEF DATA OFFICER: BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION LEADER

Among the CDO community, there is consensus that the CDO role is that of a transformer. CDOs are not only charged with building key data capabilities but also cultivating a data mindset that continuously unlocks data's value for the business.

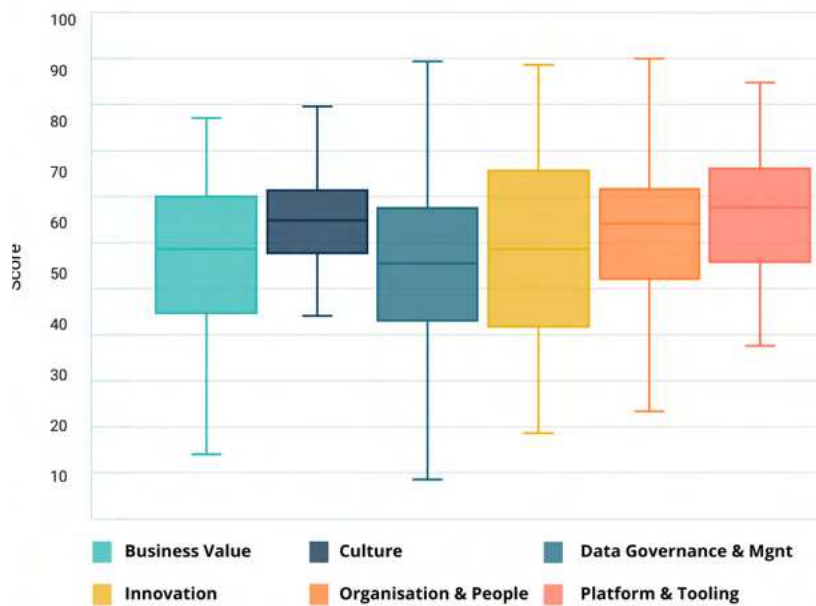
However, the CDOs' ability to successfully execute a transformation data strategy comes into question when observing the disparity among organisations in advancing their core capabilities.

For example, Data Leaders benchmarking data shows that while the best-performing companies in terms of data governance and data management report having built a close to optimal environment and governance (90%), the majority report they are just 30 to 60% of where they aim to be, with the lowest performing companies barely off the ground (5%). It is worth noting that companies included in this data set are large corporate enterprises, not small businesses.

FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF HOW CDOS REPORT THEIR CAPABILITY ACROSS SIX KEY DIMENSIONS OF DATA AND ANALYTICS TRANSFORMATION.

Source: Data Leaders Data Capability Matrix.

This disconnection between the importance of the CDO's role as a transformer and the varying degrees of progress in implementing key data capabilities raises important questions. How can CDOs bridge this gap effectively? What strategies are needed to ensure the vision of the CDO role aligns with the reality of the organisation's data capabilities?



Investigating the underlying reasons for these discrepancies, the Guild Think Tank brings attention to three problematic areas that notably impede the CDO's capacity to effectively implement their data strategy: uncertainty regarding CDO objectives, insufficient appreciation of data's worth (lack of data literacy) and confinement of the CDO within a technical or operational role.

TO TACKLE THESE ISSUES, CDOS NEED TO:

- ✓ Strive for clear goal clarification.
- ✓ Sell the value of data.
- ✓ Approach data as a people business rather than a purely technical aspect.

STRIVE FOR GOAL CLARIFICATION

According to research published in the [Harvard Business Review](#), CDOs have one of the shortest tenures in the data industry: just two and a half years. Volker Buscher, Advisory Board Member at Data Leaders, asserts that establishing strategic goals is a precursor to value creation, and the lack of clear goals is one of the primary reasons for this statistic.

CDOs relish the prospect of data-enabled business transformation. However, when organisations struggle to define the strategic goals, they often find their daily reality focused on addressing a slew of misaligned expectations, unpredictable assumptions and dealing with a loss of momentum that leads them to ultimately part ways with their company.



“There is a sense that transformation should feel like walking in sunshine and should be an aspiration about the future of the company, but it can turn into a grind of arguments with different executives,” explains Buscher.

Buscher proffers that CDOs are hired to pursue either one or a combination of three goals: data services – the provision of data, dashboards and decision-making tools; data enablement – enabling the transformation of part of the business, e.g., one division or geographic unit with a view to scaling or, the third kind, company-wide transformation.

“

The cornerstone of a successful data strategy is complete clarity of the CDO’s goals. This must be determined before the CDO is hired or reassessed together with the CDO and the executive leadership team.”

Volker Buscher, Advisory Board Member, Data Leaders.

BREAKING THE CDO GLASS CEILING

FIGURE 2: GOAL-DRIVEN ORGANISATIONAL MATRIX FOR CDOs.

It is the business goal that determines the profile of the CDO, the organisational structure, and the interpersonal relationships required to execute, above all, the intricate relationships with the CIO, the CEO and the executive team. Value is not captured, or issues arise when there is no explicit consensus on which goal is being pursued.

Enterprise Data Roles		Actionable Insights	Tangible impact on: a) customer, b) profit or c) valuation	
		Data Services	Enablement of the Business	Business Transformation
Business Leadership	CEO	Informed	Engaged	Owner
	MDs (with P&L)	Consumer	Owner vs Consumer	Owner
	Officers (e.g. Marketing)	Consumer	Owner vs Consumer	Owner
Digital Leadership	CIO / CTO	Partner	Partner	Partner
	CDAO	Owner	Owner	Owner
Data Team	Data UX			
	People & Organisational Development			
	Product, Innovation & Partnerships	Owners	Owners	Owners
	Data Governance Data Infrastructure & Science			
Company-Wide	Leadership & Management	Consumer	Engaged vs Consumer	Engaged
	Experts	Provenance	Provenance	Provenance
	All Staff	Consumer	Engaged vs Consumer	Engaged

“The starting point is that the C-level is not sufficiently engaged or owning what data-enabled goals they want to deliver for the organisation or what they want to achieve by appointing a CDO. In some cases, the goal is just to figure out what to do with data.

This creates the conditions where a) the ongoing role of business leaders in delivering the data strategy is unclear and b) the resulting confusion stops the CDO from building ownership and legitimacy for data-enabled business transformation.

Agreement regarding roles and goals is a must-have to create the interpersonal relationships required to successfully sustain transformation.”

Volker Buscher, Advisory Board Member, Data Leaders.



SELLING THE VALUE OF DATA

Where a lack of clarity or pushback exists, CDOs find that selling the value of data and data-enabled business change is still the vital steppingstone to securing sponsorship, underscoring the need to adopt a business mindset and language to connect with their stakeholders' needs and close data literacy gaps.

"We need to speak to business metrics and KPIs to overcome resistance," insists **Tembi Hommes, Group CDO, Arup**. "For example, when securing funding for an MDM programme, my conversation with senior stakeholders was completely focused on how we measure customer churn. The word "MDM" was not mentioned once."

Another approach CDOs strongly advocate is focusing on the triad of customer-centric metrics: acquisition, engagement and retention to fully align them with commercial strategies and goals. **Geraldine Wong, CDO, GXS Bank**, gives a clear example of how this strategy made significant inroads to building trust.

"We identified an opportunity to increase customer engagement by 50% through the development of a consumer app," Wong explains. "By working hand-in-hand with business and marketing colleagues along the full development journey, we were not only able to deliver proven results but also become a trusted ally for future data-driven projects."

Decathlon offers another illustration of a company that has effectively integrated data into companywide transformation:

"At Decathlon, data is seen as a transversal enabler across all of our digital levers. We have a clear transformation roadmap that revolves around five key strategies and an operating model that engages four senior business leaders: business, data, tech and digital," explains **Didier Mamma, VP Data Value Creation & Data Lab, Decathlon**.

Nevertheless, he still acknowledges challenges, particularly resistance to change. CDOs recognise that the critical skills for tackling these obstacles are interpersonal of nature.

DATA IS A PEOPLE BUSINESS

“Being a CDO is more about people than it is about data,” affirms **Sarah Hillman, Global Head of CRM & Data, The Travel Company**.

This is universally felt across the Guild Think Tank. While, traditionally, CDOs are sought after for their high IQ and ability to lead a data technology strategy, CDOs leading transformation must also possess a high EQ – emotional intelligence – to build trust-based relationships that enable them to explore and understand business challenges deeply.

This leadership quality is often overlooked by senior executives who view the CDO’s contribution solely in terms of delivering data infrastructure and technical solutions. However, as **Eddie Short, CDO, MidEuropa** underscores, it’s not your data or technology that creates sustained competitive advantage but how you use it:

“As CDOs, we want to say how data solves your problems. My lesson is: it doesn’t. Only by working with other people in the organisation and working with their problems and their teams and their capabilities and working with them to understand the customer can you put data together and get the multiplying factor,” he says.

Kirit Solanki, VP Group Data and Analytics, Inter Ikea, fully agrees: “The data journey is really a change management journey. When you do change, you realise that technology is really not on the critical path as a CDO. It’s all about getting connected to the business, the CFO and the CEO. These are the skills that will make you successful as a CDO.”

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Position yourself as a transformational leader.
 - ✓ Cultivate cross-functional collaboration to drive change.
 - ✓ Be explicit about goals and sponsors.
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CHIEF DATA OFFICER GUIDE THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

With the hyper-acceleration of the data landscape, new opportunities and threats are creating evermore complex and dynamic environments for organisations. A rapid influx of AI solutions is spawning new companies and business models at an unprecedented rate. This ongoing disruption poses significant obstacles, particularly for those responsible for shaping an organisation's course. With fluctuating circumstances and uncertainty becoming the norm, the need for guidance is paramount.

Amid this turbulence and due to the ubiquity of data, the CDO emerges as a pivotal figure, a guide through the ever-shifting landscape. However, to maintain a steady course through the quickly shifting priorities, CDOs will need not only the right sponsorship and resources but also a resilient mindset.

A source of inspiration to achieve this is the world of start-ups. According to **Andrew Day, CEO of AI.Scout and four-time CDO**: "the entrepreneurial mindset shines brightest when faced with adversity; where a corporate leader might see a problem and freeze, an entrepreneur sees an opportunity and acts."

He encourages CDOs to think big and not shy away from hard problems – just be smart about how to tackle them: "At the start of every project, we ask ourselves five questions: why, why, why, why and why? It challenges us to think of new ways to solve problems, like how we manage permissions or measure performance. If you want to get the hard things done, don't stop asking why."

He also adds that crystalising your mission or purpose into a single story or muse that can be called to mind in challenging times will keep you and your team guided towards your North Star.

CDOs can draw reassurance knowing that they are all charting the same course. "I come from a background using social health and care data rather than business data, and the most amazing thing to see is that the CDO's challenges are all the same regardless of sector," says **Ann John, Professor of Public Health & Psychiatry, Swansea University**.

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Bringing disruption feels uncomfortable. Get used to it.
- ✓ Surround yourself with like-minded people pursuing a common mission but with different ideas on how to achieve it.
- ✓ Be resilient. If you lose faith, so will your team. Have a muse that reminds you of your purpose.

CHIEF DATA OFFICER STEWARD OF DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

“The CDO’s role is to influence the company to improve decision-making.” **Matt Jeffries, Group Chief Analytics Officer, Pepper Finance.**

Decisions have been a cornerstone of human existence, woven into our daily lives throughout history. Over time, we’ve developed skills to analyse information, trust our instincts, and weigh consequences. Yet, inherent biases often subtly distort our decision-making.

Against this backdrop, CDOs emerge as the central figure in enabling organisations to make better-informed decisions. However, even thirty years after the introduction of business intelligence solutions, CDOs still find this task far from straightforward.

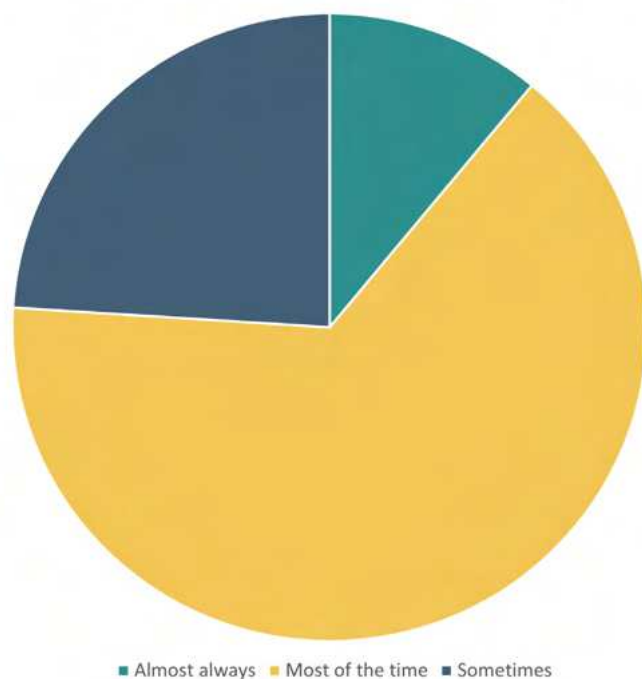
Academic research suggests CDOs might steer organisations toward objective data-driven decisions through training to eliminate implicit biases. However, Jeffries argues that such programmes often fall short of their aims due to a lack of practical understanding of the complex decision-making landscape, where dominant personalities can still override factual insights.

FIGURE 3: CDOS REPORTING THE REGULARITY WITH WHICH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DECISION-MAKING IS BACKED UP BY DATA.

Source: data leaders data capability matrix

“The most sophisticated data analysis won’t suffice if leaders have already made up their minds,” underscores Jeffries.

Executive Committee decision making is backed up by data



Indeed, Data Leaders' benchmarking data points to many senior executives still taking decisions without data to back them up, finding that a quarter of Executive Committee decisions are based on data only half the time, and most decisions (65%) around 75% of the time. Only 11% of Executive Committee decisions are nearly always data-informed.

To foster a shift in the decision-making culture, CDOs must recognise that effective training must help individuals become aware of their biases and work to minimise their influence on decisions. Acknowledging the apprehension of relinquishing power, data should be positioned as a tool to enhance decision-making, not as a replacement. Executive leaders should feel empowered, not threatened, to model effective decision-making behaviours for their peers.

Robbie Priddle, Head of Data Enablement at Specsavers, stresses the importance of CDOs acknowledging their own biases. "For instance, when challenging the status quo or introducing novel ideas, a common bias is to perceive losses as more impactful than gains. Understanding our biases equips us to anticipate biases in others when implementing changes."

Jeffries urges CDOs to play a central role in fostering robust decision-making practices by promoting self-awareness and nurturing a culture of open conversation, acting as a guide to explain biases and steer users towards decisions that are well-informed and aligned with their objectives.

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Take the fear and debate out of data: position it as a tool to augment decision-making, not a substitute.
- ✓ Make models transparent and introduce clear policies on who, when and how they must be used, and when they should be overridden.
- ✓ Break complex problems into smaller questions that are easier to address and verify and harder for dominant voices to reframe. Be transparent about what can and cannot be answered.

CHIEF DATA OFFICER GUARDIAN OF GOOD COMPANY DATA PRACTICES

The evolution of the European Union's Data Act signifies a potentially seismic shift for businesses, public organisations and citizens. As the stewards of their company's data, executive leaders will be looking to their Chief Data Officers to ensure that their data complies with regulation and that emerging threats and opportunities triggered by the act are detected in good time .

The EU Data Act, agreed upon on 28th June 2023, sets the foundations for data exchange among any player of any industry for the creation of a valuable data market in Europe.

Many CDOs view the Act positively : "As a service-oriented company that acquires a lot of assets to run our operations , we are very encouraged by this piece of European legislation that's going on." **Xavier Lagardère, Chief Data Officer, Lufthansa Group.**

However, there is some caution that certain clauses may pose challenges for companies in terms of monetising their data products, ensuring customer data privacy, and managing compliance-related costs. As **Francisco Montalvo, Chief Data Officer, Telefónica**, explains, "The Act intends to create an environment in which European companies can generate value on top of a solid ecosystem of data spaces. However, it tries to lay out some exceptional situations in which data must flow from private companies to public administrations without compensation. This is an evolution which many data leaders find troubling."

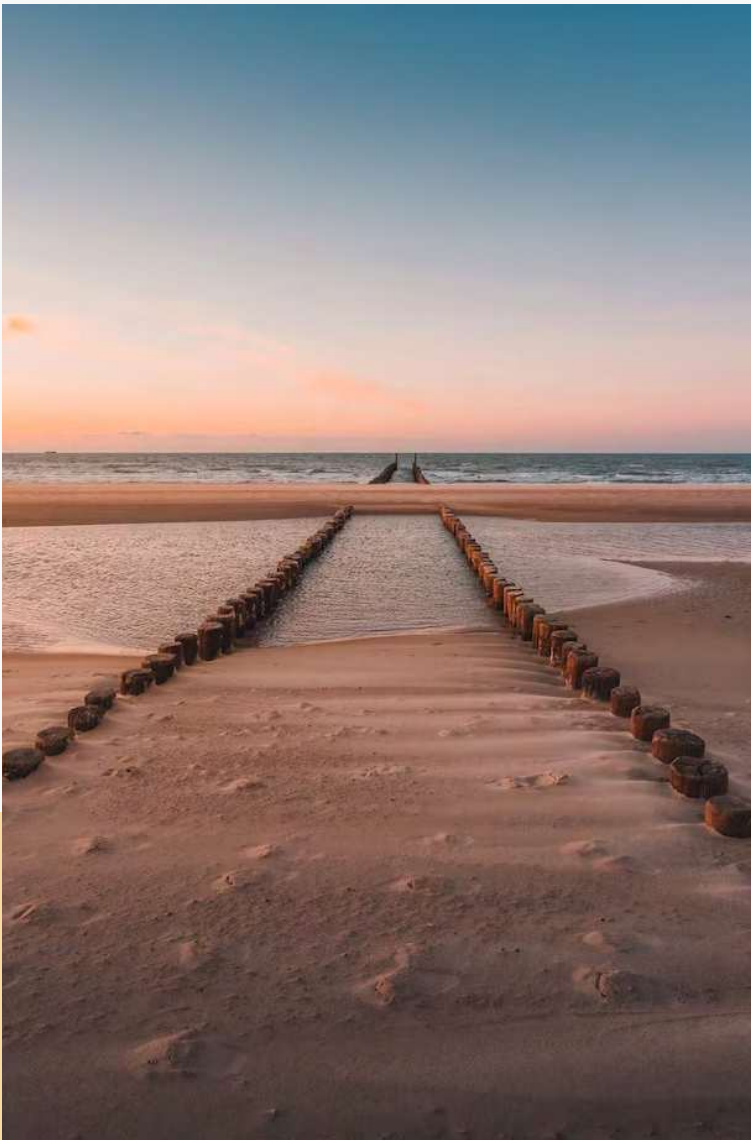
As the Act comes into effect, CDOs must play a critical role alongside other chief executives to be particularly vigilant in how it could impact business models or introduce unexpected costs while simultaneously working to capitalise on the opportunities it will represent.

"The CDO will need to achieve a balance between the risk versus opportunity and to understand the impact of legislation on the business," asserts **George Gouveia, Head of Data, Analytics & AI, Solvay.**

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Stay informed and engage stakeholders: work with legal teams to stay up to date with the development of the EU Data Act and any associated regulations.
- ✓ Understand your government's position on data sharing and engage in discussions and collaborations to influence policy decisions.
- ✓ Calibrate your Big Data business to adapt to the new scenarios.

BROADENING THE CDO HORIZON



IN THIS SECTION, WE LEARN HOW CDOs ARE MANAGING THE INCREASING PREVALENCE OF GENERATIVE AI WITHIN THEIR ORGANISATIONS BY TAKING BOTH A DEFENSIVE AND OFFENSIVE APPROACH TO EXERCISE A DUTY OF CARE WHILE EXPLOITING ITS BENEFITS.

As organisations enter a transformative era, the Chief Data Officer's potential to create impacts far beyond technical data infrastructure only grows.

Moreover, we explore how CDOs are now leveraging their data capabilities to accelerate the attainment of strategic objectives, such as carbon emissions reduction goals, and deploying AI at scale to optimise business processes across the entire organisation.

We explore the CDO's role as a:

- Surfing the AI Wave
- Connecting Corporate Sustainability Objectives
- Enabling End-to-End Transformation

SURFING THE AI WAVE



The landing of generative AI tools into the hands of the mainstream marks a new chapter in the story of AI. Now, at every organisational level, there is renewed interest and curiosity in data's potential to redefine the business. Abstract data concepts are becoming tangible solutions, and customers and business leaders are seeing a glimpse of AI's potential.

This sudden spotlight on AI data capability presents CDOs with a double-edged sword. On one hand, it gives CDOs a much-needed opportunity to re-educate executives about the essential data management practices required to deploy AI models. On the other, it puts them under increased pressure to deliver AI models fast in the scramble to remain competitive.

It gives rise to a debate regarding the CDO's role in this new complex landscape. While AI brings tremendous opportunities for transformation, it also brings tremendous risk for both the organisation and the CDO who, should AI falter, will likely bear the brunt. To successfully balance both, the debate, therefore, is whether CDOs should own AI or predominantly own the guardrails and policies.

Today's CDOs are taking mixed approaches. An example of this can be found with the deployment of ChatGPT. One CDO describes taking a controlled approach to rolling it out function-by-function with a set of clearly defined use cases. A different approach has been to deploy it more broadly across the organisation, flagging risks to senior management and providing an initial set of guidelines; a more detailed set of policies will be delivered later.

In broad terms, the CDO's success in the AI realm hinges on overcoming a core set of challenges: accelerating data readiness, connecting AI to business value and safeguarding ethics, security and privacy.

ACCELERATING DATA READINESS

Simply put, without quality data, AI is unattainable. Data readiness is paramount, and responsibility clearly lies with the Chief Data Officer. Despite data management being the core CDO focus since the role's creation, Data Leaders' benchmarking data shows major gaps in the data readiness of the majority of companies, namely a lack of companywide data quality programmes, data architecture and governance. Neither budget nor technology stack are deemed to be the underlying problem, but as earlier findings from this report would point to, data literacy.

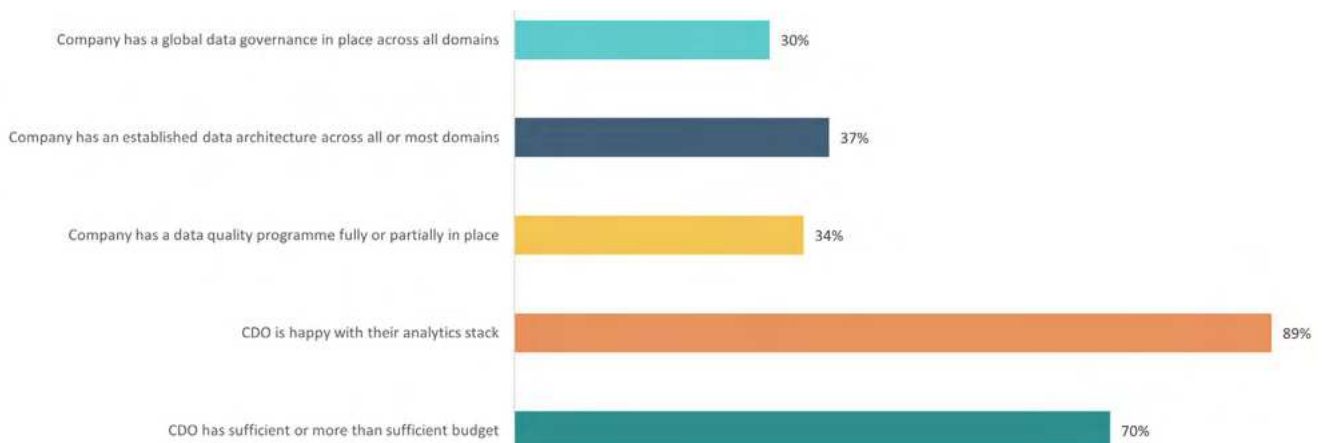


FIGURE 4: CDO REPORTING OF THEIR STATE OF DATA READINESS.

Source: data leaders data capability matrix.

CDOs are therefore capitalising on the renewed enthusiasm for data sparked by generative AI to re-educate stakeholders on ai as a whole:

“The hype around AI is actually liberating because it’s closing the data literacy gap. We’re now having conversations about how to leverage it in their own business and functions, as opposed to talking more generically about using data to improve the business,” explains **Xavier Lagardère, Chief Data Officer, Lufthansa**.

“We’ve used the buzz to create a video series on generative AI, underlining the message that if your data is bad, the outcome will be bad. It has highlighted the need to create mandatory training on how to use AI safely.”

Nirali Patel, Group VP, Data Strategy, Liberty Global.

FOCUS AI ON DRIVING VALUE



A danger highlighted by the Guild Think Tank was the lack of clarity on the value delivered by adopted AI tools. A CDO shared that ChatGPT has been deployed in their organisation's customer care, finance and HR functions, but their question remains: "What is the value that we are getting out of it?"

This is a question CDOs will inevitably be obliged to answer. One approach to provide a response has been to focus users on productivity gains through the creation of a network of prompt engineers who act as guides instead of letting users "fly solo."

The same clear focus on value is required when creating new AI models.

Geraldine Wong, CDO, GXS Bank, highlights the need for CDOs to take the lead in building prototypes, collaborating with the business to identify the big wins and then co-create AI solutions with them by building squads from cross-functional teams.

Didier Mamma, VP Value Creation, Decathlon sees the data team's responsibility to "master AI technologies to be able to support the business, verify their needs and provide them with a framework to try and test new models, work with legal and ensure explainability. The challenge now will be how reactive we can be to the business."

SAFE AND ETHICAL DEPLOYMENT OF AI MODELS AND TOOLS

In the AI age, the ethical implications of AI decisions are becoming as critical as the technological advancements themselves, with CDOs called upon to provide essential safeguards. This, without a doubt, increases the complexity of their role.

The need to maintain data quality and accuracy to prevent flawed outcomes and misguided answers is paramount. CDOs highlight the demand for increased focus on governance and quality, with special emphasis on data ethics. They also stress the need to address explainability:

“We have an educational responsibility, and we are going to face challenges. We need to be very pragmatic. We need to get people to feel comfortable and are ready to deploy.” **Francisco Montalvo, Chief Data Officer, Telefónica.**

Concerning mitigating data privacy and intellectual property risks posed by the widespread deployment of ChatGPT, CDOs are taking action. For example, all Guild Think Tank CDOs are looking at enterprise open.ai to secure data privacy guarantees and create controlled environments.

“ChatGPT will be transformational. For example, in our contact centre, the opportunities are massive. But we need to ensure our data is kept private. This guarantee is a must.” **Francisco Montalvo.**

The awakening to AI data capabilities undoubtedly heralds a new phase in the evolution of the CDO role. AI will not only expand the scope of their responsibilities but also introduce new layers of complexity. This brings forth a multitude of opportunities for CDOs to become even more instrumental in steering their companies' transformation.

However, this pivotal role does not come without its challenges and responsibilities. CDOs must act with caution and deliberation, as missteps could lead to significant consequences for both the CDO and the organisation at large. Ethical considerations, data quality, governance, and transparency stand as critical pillars that the CDO must uphold in the face of AI's potential. The allure of AI's capabilities must be balanced with a clear understanding of its limitations, and CDOs must serve as custodians of data ethics.

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ AI is already in use at every layer of organisations. Think about how to mandate its use to protect IP, data privacy.
- ✓ Utilise generative AI interest to launch comprehensive data literacy programs across organizational levels.
- ✓ Use it to deepen connection with the business by uncovering productivity gains.

BROADENING THE CDO HORIZON

CONNECTING CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES (ESG)

In 2022, the Guild Think Tank identified climate change and sustainability as one of the three key trends set to imminently land on the CDO agenda. With a strong impulse from financial markets for companies to secure long-term profitability, "more than 90% of S&P 500 companies now publish ESG reports in some form." (McKinsey)

Markets and government demand two key steps in data-enabled sustainable futures:

1. Greater transparency and assurances against greenwashing: the ability to confidently report using reliable real-life data becomes ever more important.
2. Actionable insights that lead to measurable improvements: e.g. in the reduction of carbon emissions or improved water efficiency across the entire business and supply chain.

While sustainability offices are commonplace, they are often still working in isolation from the data team. The opportunity for CDOs to partner with them is one that not only broadens their impact but enriches the CDO's purpose.

"Historically, we use data to make business more profitable. This is exciting and gives data a new lease of life," says **Bhavik Davda, Chief Customer Insight & Analytics Officer (Europe), A.S. Watson.**

While CDOs recognise that the task is daunting, they also recognise that the key step is to start where you are:

"You need to move fast where you can and slow where you must. Some efforts will take a long time, but we have no regrets in starting." – **Laia Collazos, Chief Data & Analytics Officer, Coca-Cola EuroPacific Partners Plc**

Collazos also advocates using data to connect to Chief Sustainability Officers and their teams who are often blind to the opportunities of leveraging data beyond what they currently use.

"The Chief Sustainability Officer already had a lot of data, but it was dispersed in Excel files and compiling the annual report was laborious. When I showed him how my team could help - not only to speed up the report creation but also fix some of the data inaccuracies at source - he was delighted."

CDOs able to forge partnerships with counterparts quickly find themselves at the centre of the sustainability ecosystem.

“When it comes to sustainability, I think Chief Data Officers are at the core of those conversations. We can either take a passive approach or let the others drive the conversation. I think we need to drive the conversation,” proposes **Enrique Méndez, Chief Data Officer, Edrington.**

CDOs see ample scope for making a significant contribution to sustainability goals, from process re-engineering to reduce carbon emissions to providing prescriptive analytics and forecasting to better understand the cost implications of varying scenarios.

Bert Verdonck, CEO, Luxembourg National Data Services, also highlights the opportunities Gaia-X represents to advance as a community towards sustainability goals: “There are so many opportunities to decrease carbon emissions across the supply chain. By pooling data and collaborating under the Gaia-X framework, we reap much deeper insights about energy consumption and environmental impact that will more quickly point us to inefficiencies in supply chain operations and opportunities to introduce more sustainable practices.”

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Use data to sell data.” Use data to lead conversations with stakeholders; they don’t know what data capabilities are already available.
- ✓ Dig into processes and look at what can be fixed at source.
- ✓ Don’t wait for experts. Train your analysts on the domain.

ENABLING END-TO-END TRANSFORMATION

“Our goal is to have 100% of our strategic and critical processes augmented by AI by 2026.” **Didier Mamma, VP Value Creation, Decathlon.**

As a company, Decathlon strongly believes in data’s potential to make a serious impact on its commercial and strategic goals. This was underlined by the creation of a new role: VP Value Creation and Head of AI & Data Factory.

Having spent the last few years honing frameworks to uncover, qualify and solve business use cases, Decathlon is now focused on end-to-end scaling of their data and AI capabilities with a view to augmenting critical processes right across the business with AI.

“We will deploy three critical digital enablers: a digital e-commerce platform, value chain optimisation, and trusted, ready-to-use common data assets. These will enable us to activate the strategic levers we have identified to generate significant revenue, EBITDA, and CO2 emission reductions.” **Didier Mamma, VP Data Value Creation & Data Lab, Decathlon.**


The focus on having 100% of strategic and critical processes augmented by AI by 2026 raises the question: How far ahead will Decathlon be in terms of business transformation compared to its peers? Will they set new industry standards and become a model for others to follow, or will competitors continue to delay their full transformation by pigeonholing the CDO as a data leader rather than a business transformation leader?

“I think the role should sit at the table and help the organisation to actually evolve and transform into the future. The role is not just that of an operational leader, which a lot of CDOs can become, but to have a balance of technical ability and strong business skills to be able to make change happen.” **Tembi Hommes, Group CDO, Arup.**

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Technology is the easy part. Business adoption is the challenge.
 - ✓ A holistic approach is vital, with collaboration and clear ownership shared among data, tech, business, and digital domains.
 - ✓ Automation must be balanced with human decision-making for successful transformation and maintaining competitive advantage.
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CONCLUSION



The business landscape is evolving before our very eyes, with the pace of change set to increase exponentially. These transformative forces are not only reshaping industries but will determine the success or failure of companies. As the insights of this report clearly convey, the role of the Chief Data Officer (CDO) is paramount in driving and sustaining this transformation.

The role is evolving far beyond the realms of technology. Today's CDO serves as a catalyst for business change, bridging the gap between data and the core business objectives. More than their technological expertise, their business acumen, emotional intelligence, and leadership qualities are unlocking the true value of data and delivering innovative solutions. They are agents of change and guardians of good data practices that are critical in leading their organisations to become truly data-enabled.

However, as explored in this report, many CDOs still find themselves hindered by a lack of data literacy among senior executives, a fundamental underappreciation of the far-reaching implications of data for their business. Goals that are not completely aligned and adopted by the executive leadership team diminish the CDO's legitimacy to operate in key business areas. Without clear sponsorship, resistance to change increases, and the time for transformation is further delayed.

For true transformation to be achieved, the support of the entire executive team, starting with the CEO, is imperative. The CDO's voice at the table is critical, acting as the chief connector of data and value that will ultimately determine the organisation's future trajectory, from both a commercial and sustainability standpoint.

Looking ahead, the role of the CDO will continue to evolve and expand in significance. The challenges and opportunities presented by data and AI will only intensify. It is imperative for CEOs and C-suite executives to recognise the indispensable role of the CDO and provide unwavering support in their pursuit of data-enabled excellence.



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